DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 241 237 RC 014 658

AUTHOR Fink, Deborah; Schneider, Dorothy
TITLE Iowa Farm Women in the 1930s--A Reassessment.
PUB DATE Feb 84
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the American Farm Women in Historical Perspective Conference (Las Cruces, NM, February 2-4, 1984).
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Clubs; Community Attitudes; Community Involvement; Community Organizations; Economic Climate; Extension Education; *Family Income; Farm Accounts; Farm Labor; Females; Food; Leadership Training; *Rural Economics; Rural Environment; *Rural Extension; *Rural Farm Residents; *Rural Schools; Rural Urban Differences; School Community Programs; School Community Relationship; Sex Role; United States History
IDENTIFIERS Depression (Economic 1929); *Farm Women; *Iowa

ABSTRACT

Both economically and socially, Iowa farm women played important roles in supporting and maintaining the rural population during the 1930s. They continued their patterns of production for consumption and for income, and during the Depression this production constituted a larger and more significant part of the household economy. Women kept large gardens and orchards and dried or preserved fruits and vegetables for later use; they butchered poultry and gathered eggs for family use and for sale; they separated cream and sold cream, butter, and cheese to town customers. While poultry raising was expected of women and was not considered technically sophisticated, it entailed considerable skill; women learned it from their mothers and from extension education programs and farm journals. Ironically, many farm women and their families experienced improved living conditions during the 1930s, because of improved automobiles, better roads, and especially electricity. Many took part in more activities outside the home. Rural schools provided a focal point for rural neighborhoods, as box socials, spell downs, picnics, and general neighborhood meetings were held there. Schools kept people in touch and provided an important social outlet for neighborhood residents. Farm women also took part in many extension activities, including helping select the annual extension project and attending leadership training schools. (MH)

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"Iowa Farm Women in the 1930s -- A Reassessment"

By

Deborah Fink and Dorothy Schwieder

Ames, Iowa

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"Iowa Farm Women in the 1930s -- A Reassessment"

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During the decade of the 1930s, Americans suffered the most severe and the most prolonged economic depression in their history. The depression brought great suffering to America's farm families. For many years, Iowa's rural people faced low farm prices; at times, prices for corn and hogs fell below the costs of production. Farm debts increased and farm families found it difficult to meet their financial obligations. Yet the number of farms remained nearly constant. Given the ongoing process of industrialization, a large number of farm people would have moved to the city had there been jobs. But the depression kept these persons in rural areas as redundant, underemployed farm workers.[1] Traditionally historians and other scholars have examined the farm depression of the 1930s from the perspective of the total farm income, paying particular attention to prices paid for basic farm products such as corn and hogs. Moreover, historians have been concerned about the farmer's total purchasing power, the rate of mortgage foreclosures and hence about the impact of the New Deal farm programs.

Most historians have not, however, considered the role of farm women. Iowa farm women as well as men shouldered new responsibilities in the thirties. Both economically and socially farm women played important roles in supporting and maintaining the swollen rural population. Economically farm women continued their patterns of production both for consumption and for income, but during the depression this production constituted a larger and more significant part of the household economy. Ironically while general economic conditions worsened during the depression many Iowa farm women experienced improved living conditions

which lessened the isolation and drudgery of rural life. Improved automobiles, better roads, and especially electricity provided Iowa farm women, along with their families, with something of a social renaissance in the thirties.

In this paper, we will explore the lives of Iowa farm women during the 1930s from two perspectives: First, we will examine the nature of their farm production and its significance in maintaining the kin-based, owner-operated, moderate-scale farm structure which has historically characterized Iowa farm life. Second, we will examine the social changes that affected farm women's lives. It is our contention that scholars need to look more closely at the farm situation in Iowa during the 1930s -- and, no doubt, in every farm state -- taking into account the economic roles played by women as well as to recognize the social changes that took place in women's lives during that decade.[2]

The roots of the farm difficulties that Iowans experienced in the 1920s and 1930s go back to the period of World War I. That event set up a roller coaster price cycle which resulted in a farm depression ten years before the general economic depression of the thirties. With heavy indebtedness and low farm prices, farm people suffered in relative isolation during the 1920s. Many were forced off their farms. Farm women were particularly disadvantaged as they found themselves isolated on the farms, carrying water and wood and cleaning lamp posts while their counterparts in town seemed to be enjoying the leisure of modern homes and the companionship of close neighbors.[3] In the 1930s farm women came to a new appreciation of the economic resources available on the farms.

A large part of what was consumed within an Iowa farm household in the 1930s was produced on the farm under the direction of women. Women kept large gardens and orchards and dried or preserved the fruits, vegetables and potatoes for use

throughout the year. Butchering entailed the packing and processing of many jars of meat, rendering of lard, and often the grinding and stuffing of sausage. Farm women baked bread, cakes, pies and cookies throughout the year. They butchered poultry and gathered eggs for the family table. Many helped milk cows, separated cream and churned butter for the table and for sale. Most women also constructed clothing for themselves and their children. They washed, ironed and mended for the whole family. In addition, they had responsibility for the care of the children and the nursing of any sick household member. Women of the more prosperous farms had hired girls to help them, and older daughters were also assistants to their mothers.[4]

On the other hand, male hired hands and small children increased the work of the household without contributing substantially or directly to its support. Farm women gave birth to significantly more children than did urban women.[5] Carol, born in 1930, told of her mother buying clothing for their hired man as well as doing laundry, preparing food, darning socks and patching overalls for him.[6] James Hearst remembered that during the depression his family took back a hired man who had quit several years earlier to work in a factory in Waterloo. The man called up one day and said: "Come and get me. I'll work just for my food. I ain't going on relief." Although the Hearst family already had two hired men they managed to absorb another.[7] It was women's work that expanded to provide the food and amenities for this additional member of the household. Large farm households provided labor power for the farming enterprise, but in the 1930s this labor power was maintained chiefly through the increased efforts of women who were responsible for meeting the basic needs of all members of the household.

The economic importance of women's home production for consumption can hardly be overemphasized. Nationally, in farm families of moderate means (just

over $1000 annual income), the value of home produced goods constituted 45% of the net income in 1935-6.[8] Zenna and her husband Bill started married life on the farm in 1935 with Bill working his family farm for his widowed mother. He received $30 a month for the first two years and $35 a month for the rest of the 1930s. Because of Zenna's home production of food and clothing they were able to save $136 one of the first years and $138 a year later. These savings allowed them to buy their own land in 1940.[9] An Iowa Farm Security survey of 1938 found that the average value of food and fuel produced at home was $352.63 while those families receiving assistance spent an average of only $325.67 in cash.[10] In sum, while the relative weight of home production versus dollars spent varied, the input of the farm woman's home production was substantial.

Farm women also earned cash for the maintenance of the home. Cash could amount to a substantial income; but it tended (with some exceptions) to be kept separate from the man's income, which was treated as capital for reinvestment in the farm operation or was used to pay farm debts.

Iowa's farm families had diversified operations and many families had small milking herds. On these farms women and children worked in the dairy enterprises, helping to feed, water and milk cows. Almost invariably the women separated the cream and washed the milking equipment. The wife would customarily get cream and milk for her needs and the husband would get the skimmed milk, which constituted the protein for his hog operation. Some farm women sold cream, butter and cheese to town customers; most women used the products in their home and sold the surplus cream to a local creamery. For small milking operations of four or five cows the cream check tended to be considered women's money.[11]

Eggs and poultry were the most common sources of income for farm women of the 1930s. Iowa was the nation's leading egg producer from the turn of the century through World War II. These eggs came not from large-scale producers but

from small flocks.[12] These flocks would be augmented by the yearly purchase of 500-1000 chicks for meat and pullets. Women managed most of these enterprises. The daily feeding, watering and collecting of eggs were often done by children, but aspects of a cost efficient enterprise required careful supervision.

While poultry raising was expected of farm women and was not usually considered a technically sophisticated enterprise, it actually entailed a high degree of skill. Women learned the trade first from their mothers and second from extension programs and farm journals. During the 1930s Wallaces' Farmer had a regular feature, "The Poultry," which gave extensive information on poultry production.[13]

By the 1930s most chick hatching was done commercially and farm women purchased day-old chicks from hatcheries. Brooding these chicks, however, demanded close attention. Women started new chicks in the spring in order to have the new hens far enough along to survive and lay well when cold weather came in the fall. But the unpredictable spring weather coupled with the absence of thermostats and, often, electricity, made this a difficult, demanding job. A malfunctioning heater or a sudden storm could kill a full brooder of chicks. Even older chicks had to be carefully tended. Hans, recalled his wife's poultry enterprise of the early 1930s:

> We had it happen too already that we was to church and a thunderstorm come up . . . . If those chicks got wet once they were goners. I know Charlotte (his wife) felt pretty bad about that sometimes. We'd have to stay home all the time, she said. You did all that work and had them that far and then you'd lose them.[14]

Demanding less time but more skill and intuition was culling of the laying flock. While poultry experts stressed that feeding high quality feed to a laying flock was cost effective, this made careful culling of the "spent hens" more critical.

The position of the pelvic bones, the colors of the comb and the feet were among the features to be observed. Some women had their flocks culled professionally, but others used a combination of intuition, extension bulletins and magazine articles as guides in doing their own culling.[15]

Farm women experienced a favorable return on increased time and labor expended on poultry production. Keeping informed on feeding, housing, culling and marketing was cost effective, as the quality of flock management meant the difference between a net profit and a net loss.[16] In order to cull effectively, one woman spent an entire day in the hen house counting each egg laid and marking each hen which laid an egg. Returns could also be increased by making the extra effort to keep a breeding flock for a hatchery. This meant that roosters were kept and eggs were carefully collected and stored for delivery to the hatchery. A few farm women had their own hatching enterprises and this meant tending an incubator and turning eggs. Most women sold live poultry to merchants or dealers in towns, but they could increase their prices by selling butchered and cleaned poultry to local customers. Even for an experienced farm woman, drawing, plucking and cleaning a hundred chickens was a lot of work.[17]

Farm women followed the usual marketing practice of taking eggs and poultry to town and trading them for groceries and dry goods. Merchants gave a slight bonus on eggs if the money was taken out in trade in their stores. Frequently no money ever changed hands. The dealer merely kept a running account of a woman's balance. Some women would develop a sizable surplus in their accounts; less frequently the merchants would extend credit if the egg money was insufficient for the needed purchases.

Most women did not keep written records of their poultry enterprises, in spite of pleas by the extension service for them to do so. We lack data from a representative sample of enterprises; and the data which are available

suggest rather than define the place of poultry in the household economy. We know that during the depression egg prices went as low as eight cents per dozen which would yield a gross return on egg sales of $120-150 per flock. A number of poultry raisers across Iowa sent in monthly figures on a printed postcard form provided by the state extension poultry service. These records (which probably represent the more conscientious producers) showed average yearly poultry profits ranging from 60¢ per bird (c. $75 total) in 1932 to $1.59 per bird (c. $200 total) in 1938. Mrs. Harry Frakes of Dallas County, a poultry producer featured in Wallaces' Farmer, cleared $2,303.39 on her operation in 1931.[18] She must have been an exceptionally good manager, and her 1000 layers were several times the usual laying flock.

Eggs, poultry and dairy products, along with the scattered incidence of boarders in farm homes had long been sources of income for women, but Iowa farm women also found novel means of intensifying labor to increase their incomes in the 1930s. Wallaces' Farmer ran a contest entitled "Swelling the Family Income" in which women were invited to write to the journal about what extra things they were doing to make money during the hard times. Most common was the direct sale of poultry and dairy products to town customers rather than to dealers. Among other products peddled were: braided rugs; tomato, pimento and celery plants; homemade quilts; Persian cats; canaries; baked goods; and black walnuts. Services offered included sewing and mending, babysitting and catering meals. Rather than cash sales some transactions involved direct trade for medical or other services.[19] Interviews with farm women yielded accounts of pastors being paid with farm produce of all kinds.

The impact of women's income on farm households can be roughly gauged in terms of available data on money earned and uses of the money. A 1938 study indicated that farm households which used the resources of the Home Management

Specialist at Iowa State (probably among the more prosperous farms) spent an average of $933 on household items, while a sample of families receiving assistance spent $324.67. In 1935-6 about one-fourth of the nation's farms had incomes of less than $500 and half had incomes of less than $1000, including the value of the home produced items which represented 45% of the $1000 incomes.[20] Thus, an income of $1000 would translate to $550 in available cash. These figures indicate that a farm woman's income of several hundred dollars would, at the minimum, represent a sizeable portion of the family expenses. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it did more.

Interviews with farm people who lived during the 1930s are mostly in agreement that food, clothing and most household items were bought with the farm woman's money. Arlene, born in 1931 on an Iowa farm, said that poultry income was all that they ever had for their household expenses. In fact when her parents were married in 1922, they lived on her father's parents' farm and did not receive a cent of the farming returns. Their only income was from poultry, which by custom any tenant family was entitled to keep as extra income, separate from the farm books. A 1935 ad in Wallaces' Farmer pictured a woman surrounded by hens; the caption read, "Farm women can now buy Monarch Ranges out of poultry money -- only $6.25 a month." Not only were women buying the bare essentials with their money, the writer of the ad envisioned women buying major appliances with it.[21]

Women's income could also reach beyond the farm household to play a direct part in keeping the capital farm operation running. The 1932 Iowa State Poultry Records Report had on its cover a cartoon of a large hen pulling a small farm truck up a steep hill. The caption read, "Helping the farmer over a bad stretch." Hans said that he used accumulated egg and poultry credit at the grocery store to pay a veterinarian for vaccinating his pigs. According to Hans, no one had

money to pay the veterinarian, who had accumulated a bill of $400 at the store, so he simply transferred some credit as payment. He would also transfer store credit to his mother, who lived in town and received payments from him for the farm property. Other farm people tell stories similar to that of Carol, whose father collected his wife's egg credit money in order to make a down payment on some cheap land in 1938. In these and other instances women's income provided the reserves needed at crucial points for the maintenance or expansion of the farm operation.[22] However, in most of these instances of the use of poultry money as farm capital the primary actor seems to be the man rather than the woman, who usually controlled the money. We have no evidence of women resenting this use of their money.

This summary of Iowa farm women's economic role during the depression has not touched on the considerable work that women did in direct support of the farm. It would be difficult to assess the varying worth of women's work in picking corn, raking hay, driving horses in the fields and doing animal chores. In addition, by 1940, 7.4% of Iowa's farm women had jobs outside the home.[23] All of this work belonged to the male's sphere, but there are many stories of women doing these and other men's jobs. What is clear is that women's work was central to the farm household of the 1930s.

While it is important to document the economic contributions of farm women during the 1930s, it is also necessary, for a more comprehensive view of farm women's life style, to examime the social changes that occurred in their lives. On one hand, farm families carried over many social practices from the previous decade. At the same time, Iowa farm women took part in a larger number of activities outside the home. These were made possible by a number of conditions. First, many Iowa roads were improved during the 1930s, thus allowing

rural women to travel to town more often. Second, during the latter half of the decade, many Iowa farm women found their domestic work lightened considerably by electricity. Third, farm women's economic activities provided them with at least a small amount of cash that could be used to hire domestic help or to purchase labor saving appliances for the home. These actions, in turn, allowed farm women to take part in more organized social activities.

For farm women in the 1930s, improvements in farm living were extremely important. During the previous decade, farm women, along with other members of their families, had experienced considerable discontent over the social deficiencies of farm living. Throughout the 1920s, farm people continually contrasted rural life with town and country life. Town people enjoyed greater cultural, social, and educational opportunities. Perhaps even more obvious, townspeople had a wide range of comforts and conveniences not shared by rural people. Town families enjoyed electric lights, electric appliances, central heating, and indoor plumbing. At the same time, rural living was often portrayed as dreary and monotonous. Even advertisements in farm journals urged farm people to take the bleakness out of their lives by buying radios, self-contained lighting systems, and other items that would "bring the city to the farm." Moreover, farm people expressed a continual fear that because of the drawbacks of farm living, rural youths would leave the farm for the city.[24]

With the coming of the 1930s, however, Iowa farm women experienced important social as well as economic changes. While major social institutions carried over from the previous decade, other aspects of rural life changed considerably, affecting life on and off the farm. Of great importance was the fact that the world beyond the farm became far more accessible. Although farm families purchased automobiles during the late teens and twenties, they often found themselves unable to get to town because of impassable roads. By the 1930s,

automobiles had become larger and more dependable. But the most important consideration was the improvement of country roads. In 1925, 23,909 farm families lived along roads that were either hard surfaced or finished with gravel, shell or shale. By the end of the 1930s, the number of farm families living along improved roads had risen to 121,863.[25] For farm families, greater mobility meant a wider range and a greater number of social outlets and advantages.

At the same time, many social activities of rural people carried over from the 1920s to the 1930s. For the most part, the social lives of rural people continued to center around family, church, and school. Throughout Iowa, rural neighborhoods abounded. Charles and Mildred, both raised on farms in Boone County in the teens and twenties, recalled that during the 1920s and the first part of the 1930s, within their township alone, three distinct neighborhoods existed. Each rural neighborhood had its own school and church. Mildred and Charles related that one neighborhood, East Marion, had a community band. Band members, with the help of other neighbors, had raised money and constructed a community hall used primarily for band practices and band performances. Sometimes, neighborhood people held dances there. At its peak, the East Marion Band contained about fifty members, all of whom were proudly outfitted in white pants, black band jackets, and band caps.[26]

The South Marion neighborhood had a church with an active program for its young people. Once a month, the young people came together for a social event. At Halloween, members always planned a costume party and in the winter, they enjoyed sledding parties. In the summertime, young people met on the church lawn for recreation. Mildred and Charles remembered that the young peoples' group was very active and had as many as thirty-five or forty people attending.[27]

Rural schools also provided a focal point for rural neighborhoods. Several times each year, rural families came together at the local school to attend box

socials. spell downs, and picnics. The rural school house sometimes served as a place for general neighborhood meetings. The rural schools kept people in touch with one another and provided an important social outlet for all neighborhood residents.[28]

An important rural institution in both the 1920s and the 1930s was the community club. In 1931, Wallaces' Farmer offered a prize of $100 to the rural community which had been the most active in the previous year. Thirty-five communities entered the contest. The Pleasant Ridge Community in Page County won first place. Residents there had raised money to build a community hall when their old meeting place burned down. They constructed a hall that seated 450 people with a basement and a stage. The stage was equipped with lighting equipment and scenery props.[29] The continuation of community clubs such as that in Pleasant Ridge underscores the fact that rural neighborhoods continued to offer local farm people an important social outlet.

The diaries of farm people provide another way to determine the social activities of rural women in the thirties. In 1932, Clara Ackerman, a farm woman in eastern Iowa, wrote about many functions that she had attended in her rural neighborhood. She noted that she had attended a bridal shower, and later a wedding, for a neighborhood couple. Mrs. Ackerman wrote about attending a PTA meeting at the local rural school and also about attending church. On Sundays, the Ackermans sometimes had dinner with rural neighbors. The Elmer Powers diary also sheds light on the mobility of families during the 1930s. Powers, a Boone County farmer, kept a daily diary during the thirties. The Powers family frequently went to town to attend movies or to take the two Powers children to their piano lessons. They also traveled to town for Sunday school. A day rarely went by that the Powers family did not engage in some neighborhood social activity or travel to town. Mrs. Powers went to town to

attend Farm Bureau meetings and to shop. During the summer, the Powers family attended many neighborhood picnics. Even though the depression raged around them, the Powers family lived a life that was not too different from their counterparts in town. The same statement could not be made about farm families in the 1920s.[30]

In 1935, Wallaces' Farmer asked rural women to send in copies of their club's yearbooks and to pass along how the women handled their club programs. The farm journal offered prizes to the three top yearbooks. The yearbooks indicated that Iowa farm women were involved in many different types of club work. First prize went to the Union Township Mothers' and Daughters' Club near Algona, Iowa. This club was open to any woman in the township and offered a diverse program including book reviews, music presentations, and papers written by members themselves. The club winning second prize, the Hilltop Women's Club of McClelland, had divided its work into two departments: garden and literary. The garden and literary groups met once a month with the entire club meeting quarterly. Literary group subjects included "books, far away lands, religion, and political situations." As well as holding regular meetings, many clubs sponsored special projects such as raising money for charity, holding banquets for their husbands, holding mothers' day teas, and assisting at their rural school's eighth grade graduation exercises.[31]

During the 1930s, farm women also took part in extension activities in their counties. By 1930, the Iowa State College Extension Service had seventeen specialists and twenty-four home demonstrations agents. Extension officials estimated that the home economics personnel were responsible for holding more than 40,000 meetings throughout the state with an attendance of 238,737 people. Farm women not only attended extension meetings but also served as local leaders,

working in cooperation with extension personnel. In 1931, 10,169 rural women served as local leaders. Each year, farm women helped select the annual extension project and had the opportunity to attend training schools to develop their leadership roles. In O'Brien County, for example, the first home demonstration agent arrived in the early 1930s and the number of rural extension clubs greatly multiplied after her arrival.[32]

While these activities of rural women indicate that life outside the farm house underwent change during the thirties, it is crucial to note that life within the farm house also underwent major change. In 1935, the federal government established the Rural Electrification Association which was designed to bring electrical power to farm homes. Electricity made a monumental difference to rural people. James Hearst recalled the significance of that event when he wrote: "Farm life took on a new dimension. Not even the telephone changed our way of living, thinking and acting as much as the coming of electricity. This break with the past seemed an entrance to the modern world."[33] Unfortunately, not all farm families received electricity as soon as the Hearst family. By the end of the decade, 40.7 percent or 86,786, of all farm dwellings in Iowa were lighted by electricity. That number contrasted with 21.4 percent or 46,042 in 1930 and 15.3 percent or 32,552 in 1920.[34] Even if all farm families did not have electricity by the end of the thirties, at least with the passage of the Rural Electrication Act there was the promise that things would soon get better. This in itself marked a substantial change from the 1920s.

When farm families did obtain electricity, however, farm life became far more pleasant. In 1937, Wallaces' Farmer ran periodic articles about changes that occurred in farm homes after the electric power lines had reached the farms. In October, 1937, the journal ran an article entitled "Servants on the Farm:

Electricity in Rural Homes." The journal had asked farm women to share the ways in which they used electricity in their homes. The farm women who responded all agreed that electricity was "the equivalent of a houseful of servants -- servants that carry water, sweep rugs, help with washing and ironing and preparing of meals." A farm woman from Tama County expressed her appreciation this way:

> The good fairy, electricity, has waved her magic wand across my path and now I lead a charmed life . . . . No water to be carried uphill; no waste water to be carried out; no kerosene lamps to be cleaned and filled; no hand scorching sad-irons to be used; no fuel to clutter up my kitchen in pails and boxes; no ashes to be swept up and carried out; no exposure from lack of bathroom facilities. It seems too good to be true.[35]

A farm woman from Carroll County wrote: "To me, as a farm woman, electricity is an emancipation with the key to leisure." In total, women stated that they used all types of electrical appliances from washing machines to stoves to refrigerators.[36]

While electricity acted as a "servant on the farm," it also provided the major means of home entertainment. Battery powered radios had been available in the 1920s, but with the advent of electricity, radios were not only cheaper but had wider reception and better tone. The column, "Country Air," a regular feature in Wallaces' Farmer during the 1930s, sometimes devoted an entire column to radio schedules of local radio stations. Farm families not only enjoyed music, sports, and comedy shows on radio, but were also kept well informed of political events and agricultural market conditions.[37]

For a great number of Iowa farm women in the 1930s, electricity had made the great difference. With electrical appliances to lighten their workloads of meal preparation, food preservation, cleaning, and laundering of clothes, many farm women had the leisure time, as well as the energy, to join more groups

outside the home and to lead a more active social life. By the latter half of the 1930s, farm women could enjoy most social and physical advantages enjoyed by town and city women. With the coming of electricity, a farm woman from Dallas County commented: "The farm woman of yesterday envied the city woman for her youthfulness. But now, with our modern homes, I think the city woman may well envy her farm sister."[38]

The farm woman in Dallas County had viewed the situation in Iowa with considerable clarity. During the 1930s, social distinctions between town and country living began to blur. At times, country people with their self-sufficiency in food production seemed to have the most preferred position. The statement was frequently heard: "Well, at least on the farm we had plenty to eat." That was not always the case in town.

Throughout the 1930s advertisements in Wallaces' Farmer reflected the way in which country people were viewed by outsiders as well as the way that country people viewed themselves. Those views contrasted considerably with views expressed through advertisements in the same journal in the 1920s. Throughout the mid-1920s, countless ads either intimated or stated directly that farm life was less fulfilling and more difficult than town and city living, because farm people lacked conveniences and comforts of town and city living. Country living, the ads proclaimed, was monotonous and dreary. Ad after ad proclaimed that farm people should adopt all types of consumer goods so that they "could bring the city to the farm."[39]

By the 1930s, advertisements in Wallaces' Farmer no longer contained comparisons between town and country living. Ads for consumer items were placed totally within the context of rural society. In June, 1931, the Maytag Company ran an ad for washing machines. The ad read: "All Work and No Play is Not for the Farm Woman of Today . . . ." Two months later, the Maytag Company ran another

ad which read: "Big Farm Washings Cost Less with the Maytag." Four years later, the Monarch Range Company ran a series of ads in Wallaces' Farmer. Instead of telling farm women they should imitate town women and purchase the stoves to make their lives more comfortable, the ads made a direct appeal to farm women to purchase the stoves for their own comfort and convenience.[40]

Other articles in Wallaces' Farmer also touched on the changes that had taken place since the 1920s. Throughout the twenties, almost every issue of Wallaces' Farmer contained one or more articles on ways that farm people ought to change their way of living to improve rural society. Henry A. Wallace wrote numerous editorials expressing the view that rural people should work to develop a distinctive rural culture. Members of the Country Life Movement offered a plethora of ways in which rural society should be improved, including both economic and social changes. The woman's page in Wallaces' Farmer included countless articles touching on the fact that farm women should not work so hard, but should have more leisure time. The view was also frequently expressed that farm children should have more exposure to cultural and artistic events. By the 1930s, the tone of articles and advertising had changed. For the most part, the articles telling farm families how they should revamp their lives were gone; instead, the journal carried articles documenting the fact that considerable change had already occurred.

An examination of Iowa farm women's roles in the 1930s shows that in both the economic and social areas, there is need for a reassessment. While farm women have not traditionally been considered as income producers during the 1930s, they certainly did fulfill that role, particularly through the sale of poultry and eggs, and to a lesser degree cream and other products. The raising

of poultry was not considered to involve much skill, but in reality, it required that the farm women know a substantial amount about the feeding and culling of flocks. At the same time, women contributed indirectly to the farm income by producing most food that was consumed by the farm family and the hired help. Farm women were also indirect wage earners through the sewing of their family's clothing, and the bartering of household items with other farm women. Some farm women, moreover, contributed their labor directly to the general farm operation by doing fieldwork and animal chores. If a measure of economic control is a precondition for social power, Iowa farm women achieved a necessary, if not a sufficient, base for full participation in rural society in the 1930s.

On the social side, a reassessment is also in order. Because little attention has been given to the social side of farm women's lives, it is usually assumed that farm social life in the thirties, approximated that of the twenties. For farm women, that was often not the case. As early as 1913, Iowa author Herbert Quick wrote that farm women were often unhappy with farm life because of its isolation and because they had no labor saving machines to lighten their work loads. By the end of the 1930s, for many Iowa farm women, these two areas had changed dramatically. Farm familes were experiencing far greater mobility because of improved roads and within the home, as one Iowa farm woman pointed out, electricity had become the great emancipator. Because of these changes, the social deficiencies of farm living seemed to fade away. While the depression may have intensified the economic insecurity and dependency of urban women, it seemed to have elevated the economic position of Iowa farm women, both within their households and possibly within rural society. A farm woman who wrote "Country Air," reflected on having seen a poor, hungry jobless mother on a trip to town. Feeling sorrow at this woman's plight, she was nevertheless thankful that her lot was better:

Suddenly I thought of those jars of meat! Hallelujah! We had food! The coat which I had bought four years ago was still good. Thank goodness, I was sufficiently clad! The innumerable tasks which lay ahead of us with the opening of spring work looked big and beautiful to me. Glory be! We had a job! [42]

Footnotes

[1] Willard W. Cochrane, The Development of American Agriculture: An Historical Analysis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 122-23.

[2] In this paper, we restrict our analysis to women who were married to farmers who managed farm operations as owners, part-owners or tenants. We thereby exclude from analysis women who were running farms as independent operators or who were hired laborers. In addition to the nuclear family of husband, wife and children who were the basis of the household, a number of households also included hired help, grandparents and other relatives. The majority of Iowa farm families shared a similar European cultural background, having roots in northern or western Europe, the British Isles or Bohemia (Czechoslavakia).

Data for this paper come from interviews with people who lived on Iowa farms during the 1930s, census and survey data gathered in the 1930s, extension bulletins and reports, and writings by and about women in the popular farm journal, Wallaces' Farmer. Fink interviewed nineteen women and five men from a rural community in northwest Iowa in 1982. Schwieder interviewed seven people from central Iowa. An anthropologist, Fink does not use the full names of informants. As an historian, Schwieder does use full names, which are recorded in the footnotes.

[3] Leland Sage, A History of Iowa (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1974). See Chapter 15, "The First World War and Its Aftermath." Also see Dorothy Schwieder, "Rural Iowa in the 1920s: Conflict and Continuity!" This paper was presented at the Henry A. Wallace History Conference in June, 1983, and is forthcoming in the fall issue of The Annals of Iowa. The paper deals with the social discontent of Iowa's rural population in the 1920s.

[4] Fink interviews, 1982. Charles Crim, private interview, Ames, Iowa, March, 1983; Mildred Erickson Crim, private interview, Ames, Iowa, March, 1983; Lola Crim, private interview, Ames, Iowa, March, 1983.

[5] Dwight Sanderson, Rural Sociology and Rural Social Organization (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1942), p. 100.

[6] Fink Interviews, 1982.

[7] James Hearst, "We All Worked Together: A Memory of Drought and Depression," The Palimpsest 59 (May/June 1978): 70.

[8] Day Monroe, "Patterns of Living of Farm Families," Farmers in a Changing World. The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1940 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, A1940): 850.

[9] Fink Interviews, 1982.

[10] Mildred L. Stanswick, Certain Homes Management Practices of 73 Families in Union County, Iowa. Farm Security Studies I. Unpublished thesis, Iowa State College, Ames, 1939, pp. 30-38.

[11] Fink Interviews, 1982.

[12] R. L. Baker, "The Growth of Iowa's Poultry Industry," Iowa Department of Agriculture Year Book, 1945 (Des Moines: State Of Iowa, 1946): 570; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureua of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Agriculture (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942): 1:160.

[13] Fink Interviews, 1982; The Wallaces' Farmer poultry section was a regular, lengthy feature. In 1936, a typical weekly issue had seven page-long columns of information on poultry, twenty-five accompanying ads for chicks and other classified ads for started poultry, hatching eggs and turkeys. See Wallaces' Farmer, "The Poultry," March 14, 1936, pp. 230-231. Some of the ads had pictures of women recommending the products. Sometimes the articles would

include examples of women's operations and pictures of women doing the recommended poultry work. Although there were also many male experts and allusions to men as poultry managers, this feature was at least partially geared to female readers.

[14] Fink Interviews, 1982.

[15] Wallaces' Farmer, July 8, 1933, pp. 299, 312.

[16] "Poultry Record Report," Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics (Ames: Iowa State College and U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1934), p. 2.

[17] Fink Interviews, 1982.

[18] "Poultry," Cooperative Extension Work (1932), p. 1 and (1938), p. 8; and Wallaces' Farmer, July 8, 1933, pp. 299, 312.

[19] Wallaces' Farmer, May 13, 1933, p. 220.

[20] Stenswick, Certain Homes Management, p. 30; and Monroe, "Patterns of Living," pp. 849-50.

[21] Fink Interviews, 1982; and Wallaces' Farmer, April 13, 1935, p. 248; and May 11, 1935, p. 299.

[22] Fink Interviews, 1982.

[23] Computed from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Labor Force (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943): 3:11.

[24] Wallaces' Farmer, March 11, 1921, p. 481; January 9, 1925, p. 4; and March 6, 1925, p. 347. Also see paper, Schwieder, "Rural Iowa in the 1920s: Conflict and Continuity."

[25] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Agriculture (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942): 1:119.

[26] Interview with Charles and Mildred Crim.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Wallaces' Farmer, January 3, 1931, p. 5.

[30] Diary of Clara Ackerman, Feb. 7, 1932; Feb. 13, 1932; March 2, 1932; and March 13, 1932. State Historical Society, Iowa City; Diary of Elmer Powers. See entries for June and July, 1931, State Historical Society, Iowa City.

[31] Wallaces' Farmer, February 16, 1935, pp. 98-99. The third prize was won by the Ridge-Leeperton Club, Princeton, Illinois.

[32] J. Brownlee Davison, Herbert M. Hamlin and Paul C. Taff, A Study of the Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics in Iowa (Ames: Iowa State College and Collegiate Press, Inc., 1933), pp. 192-94.

[33] James Hearst, "Farm Life When the Power Changed," Palimpsest 60 (September/October, 1979): 145.

[34] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Agriculture (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942): 1:119.

[35] Wallaces' Farmer, October 9, 1937, p. 754.

[36] Ibid.

[37] It should be pointed out that although many farm people ceased to feel that farm living was inferior to town and city living, not all people changed their view. Curtis Harnack writes in his autobiography of growing up in rural northwest Iowa (We Have All Gone Away), that his mother pushed her children to leave the farm, believing that opportunities were greater elsewhere. Harnack's mother told her children: "Farm work could kill you." Betty Durden, raised on a farm in the 1930s in Jefferson County, sensed a similar attitude in her mother. Her mother believed that farm life was hard and that her children deserved better.

Mildred Crim remembered that it was the life long dream of her parents to move to town when they retired. Betty Durden, private interview, Des Moines, March, 1983; and Mildred Crim Interview.

[38] Wallaces' Farmer, October 9, 1937, p. 754.

[39] Schwieder, "Rural Iowa."

[40] Wallaces' Farmer, June 13, 1931, p. 75; August 15, 1931, p. 937; April 13, 1935, p. 248; and May 11, 1935, p. 299.

[41] Herbert Quick, "The Women on the Farms," Good Housekeeping 57 (October, 1913), 426-27.

[42] Wallaces' Farmer, April 11, 1936, p. 297.